Horace Allen Gasoline Station
505 East San Carlos Street
San Jose
Santa Clara County
California

HABS No. CA-2105

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Architectural and Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20043

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HORACE ALLEN GASOLINE STATION[1] HABS No. CA-2105

Location: 505 E. San Carlos
San Jose, Santa Clara County, California

USGS San Jose West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.599640.4132615

Present Owner: Mrs. Dorothy Apton[2]
2838 Moss Hollow Dr
San Jose, California 95121

Present Occupant: Pete Thomas

Present Use: Auto Repair Shop

Significance: This structure is an excellent example of the so-called "domestic style" that characterized gasoline station design in the late 1920s and early 1930s. With its massive brick chimney, steep shingled roof, and full-arched multi-paned windows, the station closely resembled the English Cottage style house that (for a time) rivaled the Spanish colonial type in popularity - even in California. The station was designed and built in 1931 or 1932 by San Josean Horace Allen, and originally leased to the General Petroleum Corporation of California as an outlet for their "Violet Ray" gasoline.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: 1931 or 1932.[3]

2. Architect: None known.[4]

3. Alterations and Additions: Gas pumps are not original, but the station itself (and nearby garage) remain virtually unchanged from at least the 1940s.[5] Only minor alterations to doors and windows are apparent.

4. Original and subsequent owners: Horace and Cordelia Allen purchased an 80' by 125' parcel of land (part of Block 2, Range 12 South of the Original Survey of San Jose) from the United Presbyterian Church of North America in June of 1930.[6] The property has remained in the family since that time.

5. Occupants: Information derived (except where noted) from city directories catalogued under the main heading "San Jose: Directories of San Jose and County," in the California Room of the San Jose Public Library, Main Branch.

1932-1938.[7]	General Petroleum Corporation of California.
1939-1940.	T. P. Williams.
1941.	E. J. Moore.
1942.	M. W. Allen.
1943.	Wesley Meng.
1944-1945.	J. A. Washington.
1946.	No information.
1947.	Horace Allen.
1948.	No information.
1949-1964	Donald Ahrens.[8]
1965.	Jim Maez (Chevron).
1966.	Mike Penfold (Chevron).
1967.	No information.
1968-1977.	Spartan Mobil.
1978-1979.	No information.
1980.	Pete Thomas.[9]

B. Historical Context: In his 1964 study of urban evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area, geographer James E. Vance concluded, "If San Francisco is the pedestrian city of the mid-nineteenth century, and Oakland the trolley city, San Jose is the automobile city."[10] Vance had in mind, no doubt, the unlovely sprawl of freeways, shopping centers, and housing tracts that came into being for the most part following the Second World War. But even as early as 1930, San Jose registered the greatest week-day auto traffic count in all California.[11] That same year, Santa Clara as a whole averaged an automobile for every 2.92 residents, an astonishing statistic.[12] And the figure was doubtless even higher in a neighborhood like San Jose's Naglee Park, "an immense tract of land...covered with pretty and costly bungalows, paved streets and sidewalks, and lovely gardens, making it one of the finest residence spots in Central California."[13]

It was on the southwestern edge of Naglee Park, in fact, that Horace Allen built his gasoline station, in late 1931 or early 1932. He must have been keenly aware of the affluent neighborhood on his doorstep. The spread of gasoline stations in the early 1920s had met with resistance from those who thought the new building type at best unsightly, at worst unsafe. Beginning about 1925, however, stations began to reflect--even imitate--contemporary tastes in suburban homes. These "Domestic stations" (the phrase is Daniel Vieyra's) minimized community opposition by harmonizing with nearby residences.[14] In California, company-designed outlets were usually built in the prevailing Spanish Colonial style.[15] But Allen's station and garage--with their steep shingled roofs, massive chimneys, irregularly-laid brick walls, and full-arched, multi-paned windows--resembled the "English Cottage" style houses then enjoying a real vogue in San Jose and, for that matter, throughout the United States.[16] Allen's elaborate landscaping (now vanished) contributed to the station's ambience.[17]

These picturesque trapping concealed a not-inconsiderable working establishment. The corner structure--that is, the station itself--housed gasoline and oil dispensing equipment beneath a sheltering canopy. Here also were located an office area, restrooms, storage and display space. A separate structure to the northeast--usually referred to as the garage--contained grease pits and racks, perhaps equipment for cleaning cars as well. All in all, Allen's drive-in gasoline station occupied a position midway between the simple roadside filling station--obsolete even in 1931--and the brand new "one-stop service station," which provided all of the above-mentioned services along with battery and tire sales and servicing, brake testing and repairing, complete "auto laundering" and the like.

The complex was leased upon completion to the General Petroleum Corporation of California.[18] This arrangement was by no means unusual, for it enabled companies to acquire outlets for a smaller amount of capital that the same number of wholly-owned outlets would require (they did, of course, provide their own standard signs, and often painted leased stations in company colors).[19] Rental was a fixed amount per gallon of gasoline sold, usually one-half cent or less.[20] After 1938, Allen leased the station to a series of independent operators, son-in-law Donald Ahrens among them. Since the late 1970s, however, the station seems to have served only as a little-used annex to the auto repair business next door; it will very likely be razed in the near future to provide additional parking for the convenience store to the east.

Notes:

1. Last name of the station qua station; so-called from 1968 to 1977.

2. Mrs. Apton's name appears as "Dorothy Ahrens" on the current deed.

3. Allen purchased the lot in June of 1931; the station was open for business no later than October of 1932.

4. Conversation with Mrs. Dorothy Apton, June 24, 1980.

   Mrs. Apton reports that the station was designed by Horace Allen, possibly with the assistance of a draftman. She believes that he was inspired by a trip "back East" made in 1930, and adds that he was very interested in "colonial history."

   There is no evidence that this was a company-designed station (see note #15, below).

5. Conversation with Mrs. Dorothy Apton, June 24, 1980.

6. See Maps, book A, page 72, in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Santa Clara County, California.

7. The Station is not listed in the 1932 city directory, but primary evidence indicates that it was open from at least October, 1932 (see note #3, above).

8. Ahrens was Horace Allen's son-in-law.

9. Thomas' auto repair business is actually located in the garage next door; the station seems to be used as an annex of sorts.

10. James E. Vance, Georgraphy and Urban Evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area (Berkeley, California: 1964), 86.

11. William F. James and George McMurry, History of San San Jose, California (San Jose: 1933), 164.

12. Ibid., 164.

13. Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles: 1922), 108.

14. Daniel I. Vieyra, Fill 'er Up: An Architectural History of American Gas Stations (New York: 1979).

    This brief account of the rise of the "Domestic station" is drawn from Vieyra's definitive work.

15. National Petroleum News, March 19, 1932, 129.

    The General Petroleum Corporation's company-designed station in Palo Alto (Spanish Colonial in appearance was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1979.

16. See, for example, illustrated real estate advertisements in the San Jose Mercury, June 25, 1931, 17 ("Seven Room English House"); July 9, 1931, 15 ("English Bungalow"); August 30, 1931, 15 ("New English Type House"); November 22, 1931, 15 ("English Cottage Style House").

17. Conversation with Mrs. Dorothy Apton, June 24, 1980.

The fact that Allen's station replaced a tiny frame house at 298 South Eleventh Street (rented out in 1928 to a bicycle mechanic and, before that, to a fruit vendor) must also have contributed to its acceptance by the Naglee Park Community. See the Sanborn Map Company's insurance map of San Jose (New York: 1915); also, San Jose city directories for 1928 and 1926.

18. General Petroleum later became part of the Socony-Vacuum company, which in turn was acquired by Mobil Oil.

19. National Petroleum News, October 22, 1930, 61.

20. Ibid., January 1, 1930, 20.

21. Exclusive of official records, newspaper articles, directories, and other miscellaneous sources referred to in text and notes.

PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Old Views: None known.

Bibliography:[21]

James, William F. and George McMurry, History of san Jose, California (San Jose: Cawston, 1933).

Sawyer, Eugene T., History of Santa Clara County California (Los Angeles: Historic Record, 1922).

Vance, James E., Georgraphy and Urban Evolution in the San Francisco Bay Area (Berkeley, California: University of California Institute for Governmental Studies, 1964).

Vieyra, Daniel I., Fill'er Up: An Architectural History of the American Gas Station (New York: McMillan, 1979).

Interviews: Mrs. Dorothy Apton, June 24, 1980.

Mr. Dee Hileman, Sr., June 24, 1980.

Prepared by: Jeffrey S. Flemming
Project Historian
September, 1980

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: This brick structure is one of few remaining examples of early service station design.

2. Condition of Fabric: Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The one story, rectangular service station building is approximately twenty-one feet across the three-bay front by eighteen feet along the side.

2. Foundation: Concrete

3. Walls: Flashed red brick, non-uniform units, laid in uneven running bond coursing with raked horizontal and flush vertical mortar joints. Gable end on the northeast facade has wide wooden boards, with beveled joints and scalloped ends, painted white. Gable ends on the other three facades are stucco, painted white. The northwest gable end has a large wooden band separating the brick and stucco and there is a clay tile vent. The southeast (front) gable end projects out from the building, rolled under ending at a large wooden spandrel beam. Approximately two-thirds way down the face of the gable, wide wooden boards with beveled joints and scalloped ends are applied over the stucco. In the center are eight diamond-shaped cut-outs for ventilation of the attic. The same cut-outs appear on the northeast gable. A brick wind wall on the north corner has a pent top covered with cement asbestos and has a wooden fascia.

4. Structural system: Load-bearing brick masonry walls with wooden beams, joists and rafters.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The drive-through on the southeast facade is covered by an extension of the gable roof and is supported by a large wooden beam on each side resting on brick columns. The square brick columns have three courses projecting at the top forming a capital and rest on a concrete island. The concrete island has rounded ends and there are three gas pumps on the island. The driveway is concrete. There is an alcove on the northwest facade at each toilet. The alcoves have arched openings formed by two rows of rowlock courses, that have all raked joints.

6. Chimneys: There is a large chimney-like projection on the southwest facade of the building, extending from the ground up above the roof. The top is banded by three courses of projecting brick and a sloping cement wash on top. Approximately two-thirds way up the chimney a sloping surface narrows the width of the chimney. This sloping surface has two wyes of brick laid flat with a cross band at the bottom edge. There is a patch of limestone on the lower west corner of the chimney. Three vent pipes are attached to the northwest face of the chimney and extend above it.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance in the center of the southeast facade is flanked on each side by a large arched window. The wooden door has a large recessed center panel and wooden surrounds. There is a transom with a large octagon panel in the center flanked by a long narrow panel on each side. All panels have a projected wooden molding. The transom is covered on the interior by a large metal sign.

There is an opening to each toilet from the exterior on the northwest facade. The wooden doors have a recessed center panel and wooden surrounds. One of these doors is boarded-up with plywood.

b. Windows and shutters: A wooden framed window on the northeast facade has sixteen fixed glass panes with a fanlight consisting of eight fixed glass panes radiating from the center. The two rowlock courses of brick at the head are arched with raked mortar joints. There is a wooden surround and a sloping brick sill. The windows on each side of the front door have one panel of glass in an arched wooden surround. The two rowlock courses of brick at the head are arched with raked mortar joints and there is a sloping brick sill.

There is an opening in the wall on the southwest facade in the toilet alcove that has an arched head of two rowlock courses, with raked mortar joints, a sloping brick sill and the opening has a decorative iron grille in it. There are wooden windows in the toilets that have eight-light and four-light casement sashes, respectively, with wooden surrounds.

8. Roof

a. Shape, covering: The intersecting gables are covered with cement asbestos shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: The open eaves have jigsaw rafter tails and there is a metal gutter on the wooden fascia board.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The entrance in the center of the southeast facade opens into a sales room which is the width of the building. There is a small storage room on the southwest side in a projecting bay, that appears like a fireplace from the exterior. At the northwest on each side of the building is a small exterior alcove leading to a toilet. Each toilet has a small room with corner lavatory and another small room, that has a water closet.

2. Flooring: Concrete

3. Walls and ceiling finish: Walls and ceiling in the sales room are plaster, painted white, with a light blue painted wainscot on the wall. Walls and ceilings in the toilets are plaster painted with a white enamel.

4. Doorways and doors: Single panel wooden doors have wooden surrounds.

5. Mechanical Equipment:

   a. Heating: No heating equipment.

   b. Lighting: Modern fluorescent lighting fixtures in sales room. Single incandescent light bulbs with a metal shade light fixtures in the toilets. Walls lights on the exterior have been removed, with only the electric boxes remaining.

   c. Plumbing: A corner enameled cast iron lavatory and china water closet in each toilet.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The service station sits on the north corner of the street, surrounded by asphalt paving. A concrete sidewalk extends across the southeast and southwest sides of the site. The garage sits to the northeast of the station. There is a covenience store sitting on the rear part of the property. Across the street to the southeast and to the northeast are residential properties. Small commercial structures sit across the street on the southwest. Across the corner to the south is a large Queen Anne style wooden house and several small victorian wooden houses. There are two driveways to the property from each street.

2. Outbuildings: The brick garage is the same structure as the station. The 27'x30' rectangular plan is a two-bay one story structure facing southwest. It has an aluminum overhead door in a metal track and a large wooden lintel over the openings. There are wooden windows with twelve-light fixed sashes, wooden surrounds, sloping brick sills and an iron grille inside of each window. The wooden structure bearing on brick load-bearing walls forms a gable roof covered with cement asbestos shingles. There is a dormer on the southwest facade that has a long narrow fixed window with an arched head, and wooden finial on top of the roof. The gable ends of the building have wide boards running vertical with beveled edges and scalloped ends. There are diamond-shaped holes cut in the wood for vents. The interior has exposed rafters, wooden framing and painted brick. The floor is concrete.

Prepared by: John P. White
Project Supervisor
June 1980

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service's National Architectural and Engineering Record in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara, California. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS and Kenneth L. Anderson, Jr., Principal Architect, the project was completed during the summer of 1980 at the HABS Field Office, Santa Clara, California by John P. White, Project Supervisor (Associate Professor of Architecture Texas Tech. University); David T. Marsh, Jr., Project Foreman (Howard University): Jeffery Flemming, Project Historian (University of Chicago); Jane Lidz, Architect/Photographer; and student Architects Kimberley E. Harden (Auburn University); Melody S. Linger (University of Florida); and Mathew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University).